



THE END OF CHRISTIANITY: AN INTERVIEW WITH CHANTAL DELSOL

Posted on January 1, 2022 by Chantal Delsol



Chantal Delsol is a philosopher and writer. A Catholic, conservative-liberal and European federalist, she is one of the most brilliant French intellectuals of our era. A member of the Académie des sciences morales et politiques, she is a professor at the University of Marne-la-Vallée, where she created and directed the Hannah Arendt Institute, specializing in East-West relations. She is the author of some forty works of political philosophy, including [Icarus Fallen: The Search for Meaning in an Uncertain World](#), [Le principe de subsidiarité](#) (1993), [L'identité de l'Europe](#) (ed., 2010), [L'âge du renoncement](#) (2011), [Populismes : les demeures de l'histoire](#) (2015) and [Le Crépuscule de l'Universel](#) (2020). We interviewed her, with French historian Arnaud Imatz, on the occasion of the publication of her latest book, [La fin de la chrétienté](#) (2021).

Arnaud Imatz (A.I.): The question of the future of Christianity and Judeo-Christian civilization has been haunting people for at least two centuries. Hegel, Nietzsche, Heine, to name but a few, announced the "death of God." Kant wished for a religion that was only "moral." The secularist Michelet prophesied the decline of Christianity. Durkheim, Renan and so many others, atheists or agnostics, proclaimed the inevitability of dechristianization. Comte advocated a religious positivism. Marx claimed that religion is the opium of the people. Donoso Cortes or Christopher Dawson professed, on the contrary, that a society that has lost its religion sooner or later loses its culture. Péguy observed that we have passed from the Christian age to the modern age. More recently, the theoretician of the New Right, Alain de Benoist, welcomed the return of paganism; Marcel Gauchet predicted the end of the religious organization of the world and Michel Onfray predicted the end of Judeo-Christian civilization. We can keep multiplying the examples.

In your case, you have published a work with the evocative and resounding title, *La fin de la Chrétienté* (*The End of Christianity*), with the Cerf, an old Parisian publishing house, founded by the Dominicans nearly a century ago. As a Catholic philosopher and liberal-conservative, you have revived and nourished the debate remarkably well. Christianity, you explain, has reached the end of its agony. And you immediately specify that you are referring to Christianity as a civilization and not to Christianity as a religion. Why this pessimistic diagnosis at the beginning of the 21st century?

Chantal Delsol (Ch.D.): First of all, to confirm what you say, yes, it is Christianity as a civilization influenced and governed by the morals and laws of Christianity, and not Christianity as a religion. Christianity is not at all, I believe, fading away or dying, but it is its control of societies, its civilization, that

is collapsing. I do not believe my diagnosis is pessimistic. My look is dispassionate. I begin by observing the incredible upheaval of morals. These reveal the beliefs and concretize them. From the moment when it is no longer Christian dogmas that decide on morals (divorce, abortion, etc.); from the moment when it is multicolored ethics committees that decide, Christianity has disappeared.



Chantal Delsol.

A.I.: The Catholic Church continues to question the Christian cultural universe, implicitly showing that it is ashamed of Christianity. The declarations of Pope Francis are unequivocal in this respect. Francis even seems to want to be the representative of a post-Christian humanitarian morality, almost without transcendence, in which the afterlife and eternal salvation come to occupy a residual place. How and why has the Church as an institution, and more generally all Christian thought, renounced Christianity?

Ch.D.: You are really asking two very different questions.

First: Pope Francis—I don't believe that he has renounced transcendence, but he is influenced by the

times, which is not uncommon historically for Jesuits, who are always under the seduction of fashions and atmospheres. In 17th century China, they were the ones who bordered on heterodoxy by osmosis with the Chinese wisdoms. In the middle of the 20th century, they were the ones who "went along with communism" and so on. Francis is fascinated by ecological religion and by post-Christian humanitarianism.

The second question—that the Church as an institution and Christian thought have given up on Christianity because there is no other way; because no Western society accepts to live under the morals and laws of Christianity anymore. In the few countries that remain Christian by name, such as Poland, the Church is so radical and rigid that it is losing its last supporters. I can see it before my very eyes, live.

A.I.: In the analysis and description of the evolution of the Church, there are two main currents. For some, since the 14th century or the Revolution of 1789, or even the Syllabus of Pius IX (1864) or Vatican II (1965), the Catholic Church has only adapted; it has tried more or less to act with the times; and this attitude leads it inexorably towards the abyss. For others, on the contrary, the Catholic Church has always fought against modernity; it has been frozen in power with clericalism and has never been resolutely open to the reality of the world. For the latter, the Christian God can be reborn in Europe through individual mysticism, or in a communal form, but only if the Catholic Church accepts to reform itself and to evolve, in particular on sexuality. In your opinion, is the present Church in the process of becoming "unworldly?" Or, under the guise of becoming "unworldly," is it in the process of becoming more worldly?

Ch.D.: In fact, we observe both these two movements which exist at one and the same time, contradicting each other and giving rise, over the last two centuries, to sometimes severe quarrels between Christians. I believe that there is a real, substantial contradiction between modernity and Catholicism. The latter cannot accept freedom of conscience, nor individualism. It is holistic by its very nature. The latest developments in the pedophilia cases tragically describe the Church's obligation to obey an age that is repugnant to it: to put the individual before the institution; that is, to become more or less individualistic. Only Protestantism is in tune with modernity. Today the tendencies within the Catholic Church are plural. Some are so worldly that they are Protestant. Others defend the old world to the hilt (I gave a conference the other day with a priest who sees the only solution in a return to the [Syllabus](#)). But one thing is certain: most clerics are uneasy, worried, tormented, and have no idea where they are heading.

A.I.: The near-coincidence of the dates of the extinction of the Marxist model and the end of Christianity is striking. Is it only fortuitous or accidental?

Ch.D.: Marxism was a response, in the 19th century, to the collapse of Christianity. It takes a lot of the Christian model and distorts it. It is part of the earthly utopias, present since the French revolution, which replace Salvation by salvation, in immanence and impatience. It did not last, because of its intrinsic madness. When it collapsed in 1989, Christianity simply reached the end of its long process of collapse (two centuries). The two extinctions are not comparable in terms of time and cannot be said to coincide: communism is a regime, Christianity a civilization, which is understood in the very long term.

A.I.: Speaking of the Western churches, my master and friend, the Calvinist historian Pierre Chaunu, drew up, as early as 1975, a damning observation in his book, *De l'histoire à la prospective*: "The intellectual and spiritual mediocrity of the leaders in place in the Western churches at the beginning of the 1970s is distressing. An important part of the clergy of France constitutes a social, intellectual, moral and spiritual underclass; from the tradition of the Church, this group has often retained only clericalism, intolerance and fanaticism. These men reject a heritage that crushes them because they are intellectually incapable of understanding it and spiritually incapable of living it." Has the mediocrity of a good part of the clergy and probably even more of the hierarchs of the Church been a major factor in the acceleration of this decay?

Ch.D.: Chaunu is right, here as in many points. It must be very difficult for a Church to give itself a clergy. Today, frequenting many institutions held by the clergy and being active in these institutions, I am struck among our clergy by a kind of immobility and stupor (just as we have seen others), by an incredible authoritarianism, as if they were the only ones who had to rule the land and the sea, and judgmental (governance is everywhere opaque, obscure), and by a sick taste for honors, for positions (I see it directly at the Institute where I have a front row seat [[1] The Institut de France comprises five academies, including the Académie des sciences morales et politiques]). All this is sad.

I believe that it is very difficult to be a cleric today, in the midst of all these contrary winds. As for what is happening in the countries that are still clerical, like Poland where I spend a lot of time, it is frightening: the clerics are from another age, living richly on the goods of the Church, imposing on the faithful moral behaviors that are unimaginable today, brandishing from the top of their authority statements that are closer to witchcraft than to Christianity ("vaccines are made with embryos"). The Church here and elsewhere is in bad health. But was it ever healthy?

A.I.: The crisis of the various Protestant churches seems to be just as dramatic, if not more so, than that of the Catholic Church. Is this proof that the problem goes beyond Catholicism alone and that it is rather a question of the abandonment or collapse [lasting or temporary (?)] of religious belief in the West?

Ch.D.: It depends on which Protestantism you are talking about. Evangelical churches are doing well and spreading all over the world. One has the impression that the religion of our fathers only survives in those branches that have completely adapted to modern times: individualism, retractable personal choice, freedom of movement, adaptability of doctrine to temperaments. Some would say that it is not a religion at all anymore. But that is the way it is. The wind of modernity is stronger than anything else; you adapt to it or you die.

A.I.: If we distinguish between the Church as an institution and the Church as the mystical body of Christ (which presupposes the solidarity or communion of all Christians with the saints), a handful of believers is all that is needed for the Church to survive. But what would the Catholic Church, whose mission of evangelization is its primary duty, be if it closed in on itself?

Ch.D.: Of course, that is the big question! I believe that we are going to go through a very difficult period, a sort of catacomb period. The main thing for us is not to blow out the flame, to keep the pilot light on. But let's not delude ourselves: it is very difficult to evangelize today, even though none of us want to use force (if we even could). There can be [monks of Thibirine](#)! That is evangelization. In the future, there will undoubtedly be better times.

A.I.: You note that the 21st century is religious, but that it is no longer Christian. You add that humanity, being imperfect and mortal, will always give itself religions, wisdoms and morals; that neither civilization nor morality will stop with Christianity. The void left by Christianity will be partly filled by multiple paganisms. But being a pagan also means praying. Because the real ancient pagans prayed, which is not at all the case today. An Italian friend of mine used to say, mocking his compatriots in the 1980s, "First they worshipped the Madonna. Then, when they stopped believing in her, they started worshipping the Duce. And today they worship the bumpers of their cars." The same people now adore their touch-screen tablets. But of course they don't pray to their tablets, any more than they pray to Mother Earth or Gaia. Can we really call these postmodern zombies pagans or neo-pagans?

Ch.D.: Yes, I think so. Of course, they are materialists! But at the same time, they reinvest esoteric, pantheistic/ecological beliefs, and all forms of pseudo magic. They are superstitious; they throw

themselves on books talking about life after death; they believe in reincarnation. Well, obviously they love their smartphones; but they cling beyond the smartphone to all sorts of crazy credulities. They are humans, you know, despite their materialism! And like all humans, they are aware of evil and death.

A.I.: *In La fin de la chrétienté*, you do not say anything about the expansion of Islam in Europe and the West. Here again, two points of view clash. On the one hand, there are those who, like the majority of Western journalists, philosophers and politicians, have been repeating ad nauseam for forty years that this is a fantasy, that Islam is plural and diverse, that Western women will not accept to submit to Sharia norms and that human rights are so attractive to Muslims that sooner or later they will adapt. They are betting on a "modernized, reformed, open, contextualized, secularized, democratized Islam," compatible with the Western model.

But on the other hand, there are those who take Islam seriously, alarmists, essayists and realist historians, who are generally insulted, like Bat Ye'or, Serafin Fanjul, Dario Fernández Morera, Rafael Sánchez Saus, etc., or who are simply ignored, like the Coptic Christian Raymond Ibrahim, author of *L'épée et le cimeterre* (2021). That they are wrong to point out that there have been "fourteen centuries of war between Islam and the West;" that Islamic teachings are the antithesis of the Western model; that the religious fervor of radical Muslims, today's Islamists, overlaps exactly with ancestral Islamic dogmas; that Western reactions are age-old self-defense mechanisms; and finally, that current rivalries are a reflection of a very ancient existential struggle. What do you think about this?

Ch.D.: I agree that there is a very old existential struggle, as you say. And in this sense, there will be, for a long time, a will on the part of Islam to annihilate the West; firstly, because the Arab-Muslim countries cannot manage to govern themselves economically or politically (except to be rentiers); and this is humiliating for them; secondly, because the men of this culture are born with an ontological and undeserved superiority, that of being male and of being able to tyrannize women; and this is a power too enviable to be dispensed with so easily. That's why we're not done with the attacks and other problems. However, there is indeed a part of Islam that accepts modernity, especially under the leadership of educated women, it must be said (and this is quite understandable). The only question is: in a case of civil war, will moderate Islam join fundamentalist Islam by historical complicity, or will it join the modern West by cultural complicity?

A.I.: The Gospels say: "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" (Matthew 22:21 and Mark 12:17), that religion and politics must not be confused. But in the face of Islamic terrorism, the

indirect support it receives from the Islamo-leftists and the new challenges of violence and conflict at the infra-state level, I cannot help but think of the words, more than ever relevant, that your teacher Julien Freund addressed to the socialist-pacifist Jean Hyppolite, during his thesis defense: "Listen, Mr. Hyppolite... you think that you are the one who designates the enemy, like all pacifists. As long as we don't want enemies, we won't have any, you reason. But it is the enemy who designates you. And if he wants you to be his enemy, you can make the most beautiful protestations of friendship. As long as he wants you to be his enemy, you are. And he will even prevent you from cultivating your garden." Can Catholics, whose "belief has become marginal," do without power and force without condemning themselves and their religion to disappear along with Christianity?

Ch.D.: The Marxists, represented at the time by Jean Hyppolite, have disappeared. But the warnings of Julien Freund are still valid in another context! Yes, fundamentalist Islam represents for us an enemy, since it claims to be our enemy—and that is what counts. We are wrong to virtuously avert our eyes by claiming that since we love everyone, we have no enemy.

A.I.: You write, incidentally, that corporate fascism (what the political scientist Paul Gottfried calls "Catholic fascism" in his *Fascism: The Career of a Concept*), "was the mad hope of preserving Christianity." But why take up this polemical concept, which only partially captures the reality of Catholic authoritarian regimes (Austria, Portugal, Spain) in twentieth-century Europe? The real fascism, the Italian one, that of Gentile and Mussolini, was part of the Hegelian tradition and the anti-Catholic one of the Risorgimento.

To take only the example of Spain, the history of the origins and development of the Civil War, and later of Francoism, cannot be limited to a simple "reaction" or desire to preserve Catholic Spain. The great intellectual figures of the 1920s and 1930s, the liberals, the founding fathers of the Spanish Republic, Ortega y Gasset, Marañón Pérez de Ayala, and even the heterodox Catholic Unamuno, were all in favor of the military uprising of 1936 (after the failure of the socialist-Marxist uprising of 1934) and rallied to the "national camp". But all were frankly hostile to fascism, agnostic or moderately Catholic.

In the national camp, only the Carlist (monarchist-traditionalist) movement, which was in a very small minority, wished to restore Spanish Catholicism in its entirety; it was anti-modern and as opposed to fascism as to liberalism. All the other parties, whose militants and sympathizers were in the national camp, monarchist-liberals, democrat-liberals of the Confederation of the Right (CEDA), republican-agrarians, radicals and republicans of the right and center, were nourished by agnostics or moderate

Catholics who wanted to adapt tradition to modernity. Even the Falange, a marginal party in 1936, most frequently accused of being fascist, advocated a synthesis of tradition and modernity. The only common denominator of these parties was the opposition to the social-Marxist or anarchist revolution and the defense of national unity. The issue was more that of political and social survival than that of the preservation of Christianity.

The Church, persecuted in the Populist Front camp and restored by Francoism, was above all concerned with its independence, as evidenced by its opposition to Franco from the 1960s onwards. So why use the generic, idle term "fascism," which we know was inherited from the propaganda of the Comintern, and which now serves only to insult and stigmatize the adversary?

Ch.D.: I don't think that the term "fascism" is idle or a propaganda term. In my book on the political ideas of the 20th century, I preferred the term "fascism-corporatism;" and I had to change publishers because the first one absolutely wanted to include fascism and Nazism in the same chapter. I know that in fascism-corporatism there were many different currents of thought. Nevertheless, one cannot deny the real importance of a will to re-establish Christianity, this time more firmly and assuredly. This is true in Western Europe, especially for Salazarism and also for Franco. I worked a lot in Central Europe on these regimes and there it was even more obvious.

A.I.: The great majority of Catholics today say that power and conquest disgusts them. You say that only interiority counts, that we must accept to be a meager residual flock, mute witnesses, that we must educate by example, and walk towards the promise of the Gospel. But historically, could Christianity have existed and could Christianity, the "universal religion," have gone beyond the stage of an obscure sect without the persuasive force of the legions of soldiers of Christ? Doesn't the decline of the Church and the "Amishization" of Catholics risk condemning them to share the fate of marginal sects without influence on the world? What can the Catholic Church be without Christianity?

Ch.D.: If overcoming the dark sect can only be done by force and conquest, I prefer to remain a dark sect. Being a woman and having raised six children, I know that the greatest forces, those of love, are hidden. If someone wants to try to make me believe that the Church is different, that it needs legions to make Christianity a universal religion, then I will answer that I do not want a universal religion. I only believe in legions of angels.

Featured image: "L'église de la Sorbonne en ruine (Church of the Sorbonne in Ruins)," by Hubert Robert, painted ca. 1800.

